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Richmond Times-Dispatch (Richmond, Virginia) · Sun, Oct 4, 1970 · Page 43
Downloaded on Aug 25, 2025

Rusty Hulk 'Dying Lingering Death'

Old Ferry Breaks Loose From Chesapeake Shoal

By John Frye
Special Correspondent

FLEETON — The rusty old ferryboat Accomac is dying a lingering death, and an expensive one.

The ferry, once part of a fleet linking Virginia's Eastern Shore with Norfolk, broke loose from a Chesapeake Bay shoal off Dameron's Marsh this weekend, only to run into a second one shore Fleeton Point and finally ground on a third between Fleeton Beach and the Wicomico light.

Fresh southerly breezes kept her restless in that area about the mouth of the Great Wicomico River.

THE TUG HEMCO of the Clinton (Md.) Auto and Marine Salvage Co. and a Coast Guard utility boat from the Milford Haven search and rescue station battled most of Saturday afternoon against a falling tide to get the Accomac free, to go on to a Baltimore shipbreaker to be scrapped. She was still stranded at sunset and the job was laid aside indefinitely.

The Hemco, with John S. Fiocca of Clinton in charge, waited at the Fleeton Point Marina until high tide about 2 p.m., then met the Coast Guard boat at the hulk. The Coast Guard had taken soundings Saturday morning.

First efforts by the Hemco resulted in a parted hawser. Then, shore observers noted, the Accomac appeared to budge slightly away from a fish trap she had barely missed in her unguided tour of Northern Neck shoals.

HOWEVER, THE tug crew either was unaware of the movement or she hung up again, for the tow line slacked and she stopped. Even with the unusually high tide, further efforts to pull her or to swing her bow and thus break her stern free were futile.

The southerly winds had combined with the normal spring tides and the pull of the new moon Sept. 30 to keep the water level above normal. However, with the next spring tides not due until the full moon Oct. 14, further work was expected to be increasingly difficult.

The Accomac grounded off Dameron's Marsh Sept. 19 when a tug taking her to Baltimore developed engine trouble. She was left with a watchman aboard, but watermen and residents of the area said she carried no light at night, as required.

FRIDAY'S GUSTY winds worked her free and she soon found deep enough water to drift toward Fleeton Point for a brief stop.

Patrick LaChampe of Alexandria, owner of a summer home at Fleeton Beach, said he saw her coming down from the shoals, watched by the Wicomico Light, and he notified a sheriff's deputy, who called his office in Heathsville, and word was relayed to the Coast Guard at Milford Haven. LaChampe said that for a time, it appeared the Accomac would come in close enough to endanger groins and seawalls built by residents to fight beach erosion.

OTHER RESIDENTS thought the Coast Guard or Army Engineers had put her there as a breakwater because of the erosion, but all agreed the rusty hulk was no addition to the scenery.

Long-time residents said that on extreme low winter tides it would be possible to walk out to the hulk. Speculation was that she would have to be cut up there or at least enough weight removed to get her off the bottom. Some concrete ballast already had been removed.

Satterfield Says His Work

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C_St_Reed
Aug 25, 2025

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